

Summaries and next step suggestions for building adaptative capacity in Local Government Organisations

A resource to support the Adaptive Capacity Checklist as part of the
How Well Are We Adapting project



Environment,
Land, Water
and Planning

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ADAPTING

Acknowledgement

Melbourne’s Climate Journey is a community led project supporting Greater Melbourne communities to adapt to a changing climate, supported by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and funded through the Supporting Our Regions to Adapt program.

Purpose

This document is intended to provide short summaries and suggestions to assist councils in building their adaptive capacity and to be used in conjunction with the Adaptive Capacity Checklist tool (ACC). The summaries below are designed to answer the question ‘Where to next?’ once councils have completed the checklist and had a better understanding of their capacity level under each of the steps. The summaries draw on the academic and grey literature and are intended to be ‘short and sharp’ providing some practice-oriented high-level pointers and tips about steps they councils can take. As very high-level summaries they are not intended to be a comprehensive guide or a prescriptive set of actions. Councils are encouraged to consider what suits their context and capacity needs. For more in-depth research please see the ACC resource library which provides links and suggestions to other materials for each of the ACC steps.

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Step 1: Leadership and Resourcing

- Climate change adaptation requires a whole-of-organisation approach supported by buy-in and support from all levels of the organisation.
- Dedicated resources and support for cross-organisational collaboration are needed.
- Getting high-level support can be challenging. For many organisations adaptation is new, issues are complex, information is uncertain and unprecedented, capacity is limited, and impacts may be in the future.
- Leadership from within the organisation and external to the organisation is important to progress the business case through the organisation's decision-making process.

Some suggested actions to help build leadership and resourcing to support climate change adaptation:

- Carefully study your organisation and understand how current conditions may either hinder or enable adaptation. These conditions may include existing relationships, how climate change is framed and discussed, degree of ownership of issues, level of agreement and desired outcomes.
- Take advantage of 'windows of opportunity' that provide critical moments for gaining support. Examples include an extreme weather event, policy reviews or new programs. Local governments have used the review of their Council Plan or Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans to insert climate change adaptation into higher levels of Council decision making. Extreme heat wave events, storm damage and extreme bushfire conditions have also prompted reviews. The review of risk management frameworks and registers have also been used to allocate risk responsibilities across the organisation.
- Focus on targeted strategies and actions not just aspirational policy statements. Ensure there is a commitment to sufficient resources to implement the strategies and actions. Local governments have implemented climate change adaptation strategies or plans to highlight the issues and commit to detailed actions and targets to respond.
- Take some time to analyse how decisions are being made both formally (e.g., policies, procedures, decision-makers) and informally (e.g. power relationships and norms) in your organisation.
- Critically analyse what may drive success for your initiative. For example:
 - What are the individual personalities, motivations and styles of decision-makers and managers?
 - What would they perceive as success?
 - What values and assumptions are driving people?
 - What are yours and others spheres of influence?

- What information might be needed by people to convince those above them?
- In the local government sector, some influences on senior decision making may include: Peer influence through CEO or director level regional networks, forums or peak bodies; State or federal government programs or initiatives; legislative requirements; Internal audit processes; Councillor or community interest in the issues; Initiatives led by influential external agencies.
- Anticipate types of resistance that might be encountered and some tactics to overcome them – for example highlighting risks of inaction or commission an independent report that outlines risks and issues.
- The Local Government Councillor Training Program may be an important opportunity to highlight the issues and risks of inaction to senior leadership and Councillors.

References:

Banhammi-Zakar, Z. and R. Hales, 2016: Guidance on how to build a business case for climate change adaptation: Lessons from coastal Australia. CoastAdapt, National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility, Gold Coast;

Hamden, R., 2016: Getting Buy-In and Support in Your Organisation. CoastAdapt, National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility, GoldCoast.

Step 2. Adaptation Knowledge

- Climate change will increase risks and vulnerabilities to council operations and services, local communities and infrastructure. Managing these risks and supporting communities to adapt are key local government responsibilities.
- Increasing knowledge about climate risks can support decision-making that better reflects climate change issues.
- Risks and vulnerabilities will present in different timescales. Planning and action are required for short- and long-term changes and impacts. It is necessary to start to build capacity to adapt through increased knowledge, monitoring and collaboration.
- Climate risk and vulnerability are still new concepts to many people and requires new ways of thinking to be integrated into the organisations risk management processes.
- Building climate risk and vulnerability knowledge is an iterative process, moving in cycles from a high-level rapid assessment to more detailed assessments and prioritisation. Ultimately, building knowledge about risks and vulnerabilities should be a collaborative process with diverse stakeholders including local communities and different sectors.

Some suggested actions to help build adaptation knowledge to support climate change adaptation:

- Where capacity is low, a high-level scan (also called a first-pass risk or vulnerability assessment) can be used to gather information quickly. This can provide the information needed to begin seeking greater support and building a business case for adaptation.
- If a scan or risk assessment has been done in the past, it might be timely to update or re-evaluate it.
- Begin to identify where information exists in the organisation and where there are gaps in data, knowledge and understanding.
- Think about the opportunities, not just risks. Many current practices do not promote social and environmental sustainability. Adaptation is an opportunity for transformation. Framing adaptation as an opportunity can also help to increase interest and build buy-in.
- Start to engage in scenario thinking exercises. Scenarios can be understood as a 'thought experiment' in situations of uncertainty. There are many different scenario techniques that can be used. For climate change, it is best to consider a range of

different scenarios, longer timescales and multiple sources of uncertainty. If time and resources are limited, scenarios can be undertaken as a simple 'brainstorming' exercise to challenge and expand existing thinking. Ideally, this would include the involvement of different types of expertise, stakeholders, and service and operational areas.

References:

State of Victoria Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2017). Climate Change Risks to Local Government.

https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/73049/Climate-Change-Risks-to-Local-Government_FINAL.pdf (Accessed 21 Feb 2021).

CSIRO (2018) Climate Compass: A climate risk management framework for Commonwealth agencies. CSIRO, Australia.

State of Victoria Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2017). Place-based Climate Change Adaptation Strategy Guidance Note 5: Exploring Multiple Futures.

https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0041/489686/RAS-GN5_-_Exploring-Multiple-Futures-.pdf (Accessed 23 March 2021).

Step 3. Strategic Response

- An adaptation strategy typically contains a range of different approaches and actions that address identified risks and objectives.
- Decision-makers should prioritise actions that are flexible and robust across a range of possible futures. Actions may need to be adjusted in response to changing conditions.
- Context-specific factors including climate hazards, local needs, values and available knowledge should inform the selection of an adaptation strategy or approach. The approach can be further refined to specific actions for implementation.
- Often adaptation actions that focus on ‘soft’ interventions, such as empowering local communities or investing in community health services, are particularly advantageous because they are flexible and address root drivers of vulnerabilities. Such actions can be considered ‘no regrets’ because they have benefits regardless of any future climate conditions.

Some suggested actions to help embed a strategic approach for climate change adaptation:

- Think about what criteria are relevant for your organisation to prioritise climate risks and vulnerabilities.
- Think about the timeline for actions. Some actions may be needed and can be implemented now, while others may not be necessary for many years. Actions can be grouped and sequenced.
- Consider what triggers and thresholds may signal a change in action is needed. Be aware of lead up times necessary to make changes.
- Identify and seek to prioritise actions that support social and cultural well-being, the integrity of the natural environment, and long-term equitable opportunities to adjust to future climate change.
- Identify synergies or ‘win-win’ approaches which have multiple benefits across different objectives (e.g. increasing home energy efficiencies both lowers emissions and reduces vulnerability to heat in homes)

References

Bosomworth, K., Harwood, A., Leith, P., and Wallis, P. (2015). Adaptation Pathways: a playbook for developing options for climate change adaptation in Natural Resource Management. Southern Slopes Climate Change Adaptation Research Partnership (SCARP): RMIT University, University of Tasmania, and Monash University.

State of Victoria Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2017). Place-based Climate Change Adaptation Strategy Guidance Notes.

<https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/information-and-resources/climate-change-adaptation-resources>

Step 4. Organisational Culture

- Having a learning approach is fundamental to adaptation because change is inherent in complex systems.
- There is a range of uncertainties relating to the drivers of change (both direct and indirect) and how systems will respond.
- Strategies to reduce risks in the face of uncertainty include learning from experience that is based on existing and emerging knowledge, and the bringing together different knowledge systems.

Some suggested actions to help build adaptation knowledge to support climate change adaptation:

- Have an explicit focus on the processes of learning and incorporate it into each stage of adaptation planning.
- Develop a set of reflective questions that can be used at each of stage of adaptation planning.
- Set up a system to document learning.
- Instead of using the language of '*adapting to*' climate change, begin to use the language of '*adapting with*' climate change. This is a subtle, yet meaningful difference. It emphasises the ongoing, evolving and relational nature of adaptation work.
- Try to communicate the idea that experiments are ok. Take small steps and gain knowledge when making changes in systems. Pilots, projects or experiments can start to build capacity and develop knowledge and experience.
- Look for opportunities to share your learnings. This can be through informal or formal processes.

References

IPBES (2019): Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany

Pelling, M. (2011) *Adaptation to Climate Change: from resilience to transformation*. Routledge, NY.

State of Victoria Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2017). Place-based Climate Change Adaptation Strategy Guidance Note 2: Establishing a Learning Framework.

https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0038/489683/RAS-GN2_Establishing-a-Learning-Framework-.pdf

Step 5. Collaboration

- Collaborating across internal service teams and with different individuals and organisations is fundamental for climate change adaptation.
- It is often very challenging and time consuming. Developing successful, ongoing collaboration takes commitment, time and skill.
- A culture of collaboration for adaptation can be built through deliberate efforts.
- Collaboration occurs when different individuals or groups identify with the purpose and task of climate change adaptation and understand that they have a role to play.

Some suggested actions to begin building collaboration for climate change adaptation:

- Look for values, interests, policy and practical links between climate adaptation and other service team priorities. For example, the health benefits of adapting to climate change or creating liveable cities.
- Look for people that are already trusted leaders and/or on board with climate change adaptation to help build engagement and convey messages to different groups.
- Work with others to design and build cross-departmental working groups.
- Recognise that collaboration requires structural, administrative, staff and line support.
- Use reflective questions to engage individuals and members of working groups.
- Use both formal and informal methods to build relationships and develop a shared identification with the collaborative efforts.
- Make the need for collaboration explicit and where possible, build it into projects, job descriptions, budgets and plans.
- Recognise, foster and practice the skills of good collaboration including active listening, problem-solving, flexibility and being open-minded.
- It is critical to ensure groups don't become dominated by loudest voices. Ensure everyone feels included and comfortable so that all voices are heard and valued. If needed and possible use skilled facilitators and mentors.
- Deliberative engagement for community consultation, is a requirement for council plans, and should also be used for adaptation planning. *“The key characteristics of deliberative engagement are considered to be: authentic engagement with the community ensure the decision-making process and the community's level of influence is clear in each instance and that participants are fully informed.*

Transparency is key to an effective process." (LGA 2020 – Principles Community Engagement)

References:

Burton, D. (2016) Collaboration and partnerships for adaptation. CoastAdapt, National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility, Gold Coast.

Corner, A. and Clarke J. (2014) Communicating climate change adaptation: A practical guide to value-based communication. Climate Outreach, Scotland.

Fünfgeld, H. (2012): Local climate change adaptation planning: a guide for government policy and decision makers in Victoria. Melbourne: Victorian Centre for Climate Change Adaptation Research (VCCCAR)

Local Government Act 2020 (LGA) (2020).

For Deliberative Engagement see also: https://engage.vic.gov.au/download_file/37880/3679

Step 6. Integration

- The projected impacts of climate change create new and uncertain risks across many areas of local government responsibility. Council decision-making can exacerbate or attenuate these risks over time.
- There are two main approaches for addressing climate change adaptation in organisations. One way is to develop 'stand-alone' adaptation strategies or plans. The other is to systematically integrate or 'mainstream' adaptation into existing policies. Used together, the two approaches can be mutually supportive.
- Advantages of an integration approach are that strategies and actions can be aligned to achieve efficiencies, create better policy coherence and increase the likelihood that key risks will be identified. Integrating adaptation can also reveal opportunities and synergies such as actions that have co-benefits of adaptation and other objectives.
- However, one disadvantage of an integrated approach is that adaptation objectives may carry less weight and priority in relation to other objectives. Without a dedicated approach adaptation objective may be lost amongst other priorities.

Some suggested actions to begin integrating climate change adaptation into organisational strategies and operational procedures:

- There are many different possible entry points to integrate climate change adaptation which will be related to many context- and issue-specific factors. Table 1 is a framework of potential pathways for integrating adaptation into organisations.
- Consider timing in opening up different entry points, for example engage with service teams and encourage inclusion of adaptation in a review of key operational plans or policies.
- Think of it as an iterative process. Getting a few small wins at integrating adaptation can support learning and may set a path for further integration in different organisational units or actions. Different strategies can complement and reinforce each other.
- Has the council put in place organisational structures, process or instruments the support the integration of other emerging, cross-cutting issues? If so, this could help create the conditions to integrate adaptation. Research what has been successful and consider what could be replicated or leveraged off.

Table 1: Framework for integrating adaptation (adapted from Wamsler and Pauleit 2016)

1. Stand-alone	Specific on-ground projects or programs that directly target adaptation but are not integrated into other work.
2. Program	Modification of work by integrating adaptation into existing or planned on-ground operations, projects or programs.
3. Managerial	Modification of managerial and working structures including formal and informal norms, job descriptions, configuration of sections and departments, personnel and financial assets to address and institutionalise adaptation.
4. Intra- and inter-organisational	Promotion of collaboration or networking with different organisational areas, stakeholders, experts, community to generate shared understanding and knowledge and build capacity.
5. Regulatory	Modification of formal and informal planning strategies and frameworks, regulations, policy and related instruments.
6. Directed	Higher-level support to redirect the focus to aspects related to mainstreaming adaptation.

Note: Levels 1-3 are applicable at all levels; while levels 4-6 promote both vertical and horizontal integration (Wamsler and Pauleit 2016; Braunschweiler and Putz 2021).

References:

Braunschweiler, D. and Putz, M. (2021) Climate adaptation in practice: How mainstreaming strategies matter for policy integration. *Env Pol Gov.* 2021; 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.1936>

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH (2016) A closer look at Mainstreaming Adaptation
<https://www.adaptationcommunity.net/download/ms/CloserLook-mainstreaming.pdf>

Runhaar, H., Wilk, B., Persson, Å., Uittenbroek, C., Wamsler, C. (2018) Mainstreaming climate adaptation: taking stock about “what works” from empirical research worldwide. *Regional Environmental Change.* 18(4) pp. 1201-1210.

P. Mickwitz, F. Aix, S. Beck, D. Carss, N. Ferrand, et al.. Climate policy integration, coherence and governance. *irstea.* 2009, pp.96. hal-02598475

Wamsler, C., & Pauleit, S. (2016). Making headway in climate policy mainstreaming and ecosystem-based adaptation: Two pioneering countries, different pathways, one goal. *Climatic Change,* 137(1), 71–87. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-016-1660-y>

Step 7. Governance

- Adapting to climate change requires different ways of thinking about governance. Climate risks are systemic and require coordinated and concerted planning and action. Siloed approaches are not appropriate for managing complex systemic risks such as those posed by climate change.
- Because of inherent and deep uncertainty in how climate change, and other drivers of change will unfold in the future, adaptation planning should be made with consideration of a range of possible futures.
- The uncertainty of climate change also means that adaptation planning should have the capacity for ongoing learning to respond and adjust to new knowledge and changing circumstances.

Some suggested actions to begin building collaboration for climate change adaptation:

- Think about how to frame issues in broader terms, for example beyond the councils' responsibilities. Look for windows of opportunity such as a major event to open the way to build dialogue or partnerships with external organisations.
- Look for a broad range of direct and indirect drivers of issues rather than focusing on symptoms. Working collaboratively with diverse stakeholders helps to broaden the understanding of drivers and identify different strategies for governing issues.
- Emphasis the process of planning and the value of experimental learning or process and 'learning-by-doing'. An important mechanism of adaptive learning is frequent communication amongst stakeholders from across sectors that have different types of knowledge. Learning also involves reflecting at regular intervals on the process used and the success or failure of any interventions.
- Test your plans against multiple plausible futures and use these to explore the robustness and flexibility of different climate change adaptation options across multiple possible futures.
- Instead of managing for stabilisation organisations should see systems as dynamic and governance as active, ongoing and adaptive.
- Making changes in one part of a system can create unexpected consequences, both positive and negative. Experiment, but be cautious and monitor results of changes that emerge from your work.

References:

IRGC (2018) Guidelines for the Governance of Systemic Risks. Lausanne: International Risk Governance Centre (IRGC).

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Fünfgeld, H., Rance, A., Millin, S., Wallis, P., Bosomworth, K., and Lonsdale, K. (2013): Climate change adaptation in the primary health and community welfare sector of Victoria: A literature review and analysis of institutional context and organisational needs for adaptation. Melbourne: RMIT University, Monash University, Victorian Centre for Climate Change Adaptation Research.